

***A Network of Sixteenth-Century Heretical Physicians:  
Between Every-day Life and Historical Transformations***

My subject is the relationship between medicine and the spread of religious dissent in late-Renaissance Italy. In particular, I aim to reconstruct and historically understand a network of 16th-century heretical physicians. Italian doctors were part of a European community of humanists. However, they were also involved in other forms of networking, especially at an underground level. When a heretical group arose in Catholic Italy, I have found that the leader was often a physician, who smuggled prohibited books, dealt with heterodox propaganda, or commented on the Scriptures within secret circles of dissenters.

Physicians contributed to the growth of what I call a “medical network of dissent”, whose reconstruction has never been attempted. Highlighting contexts and patterns of connection relating to these doctors (from a social and intellectual perspective) is essential in advancing our knowledge of the intertwining of scientific and religious kinships. Moreover, focusing on the practices that characterized and supported religious dissenters in the Confessional age allows one to identify links between everyday life and major historical transformations (Reformation, Counter-Reformation, confessionalization, early modern medicine, etc), putting religious history and the history of science in context.

In my ongoing project my main source material is a database of 210 cases of Italian heretical physicians collected from Inquisition archives. My networks analyses are sustained by visualisation through DH tools, as well as close reading of the sources. I will discuss both the potential and the challenges relating to such an approach, presenting the preliminary results of my research.